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Inside City Hall: LB takes pleas to lawmakers

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Long Beach officials have been bending ears and flexing political muscles of late.

City Council members Robert Garcia and Gary DeLong spent Monday through Wednesday in Washington, D.C., to lobby for the city's causes, and Mayor Bob Foster was in Sacramento on Feb. 14 to put pressure on area legislators.

For Garcia and DeLong, who are members of the council's Federal Legislation Committee, their key goals were to fight proposed cuts to the federal Community Development Block Grant Program and the Federal Workforce Investment Act.

The CDBG program helps cities create housing and spur development, while the Workforce Investment Act provides funding for "one-stop" career training and education programs.

Another key topic was trying to ensure that the federal government funds the East San

Pedro Bay Ecosystem Restoration Study, an \$8 million study on the effects of altering the Long Beach Breakwater, a 2.5-mile rock seawall that is blamed for trapping pollutants and deters wave action on the coastline.

Last year, the city and the Army Corps of Engineers agreed to split the study costs.

The council members said Wednesday that while they didn't get a "yes" answer on any specific initiative or funding, they got many "maybes."

They said they had a full schedule, meeting with three Long Beach-area members of Congress, staff members from California's senators, and staff members from several federal departments and

members of key congressional committees.

Asked whether it's worth spending taxpayer money to fly to and stay in the nation's capital when Long Beach is facing a major budget crisis, the council members said the trip gives them rare face time with many federal staff members who never come to Long Beach.

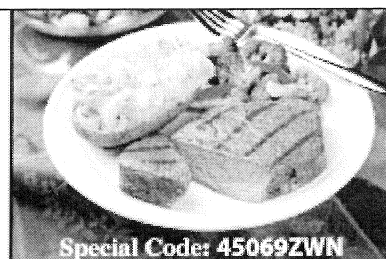
"There's no doubt in my mind that increases the profile of these Long Beach projects,"

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DeLong said.

Meanwhile, the mayor focused on a singularly important issue when he was in Sacramento, he reported to the council Tuesday: preventing the state Legislature from eliminating redevelopment agencies.

The governor has proposed the action to eliminate a \$28 billion state budget, and some Long Beach-area legislators have supported the plan.

Redevelopment programs allow cities to keep more property tax and use the money to develop blighted neighborhoods. About 40 percent of Long Beach is in redevelopment areas.

Foster said he came away from his meetings uncertain of where legislators stand.

"It's very hard to distinguish what people are saying publicly from what they really believe privately," Foster said.

'Laundry to landscape'

Don't let the recent rains fool you - California is still in a water crisis.

Long Beach has been leading the way in water conservation in Southern California,

and now the city is working on a "laundry to landscape" pilot program.

This gray water-reuse program would help residents divert their used laundry washing machine water to their lawns. The program would be funded by the Water Department and would cost between \$500 and \$1,000 per house to help homeowners divert their water lines, city officials told the council's Environmental Committee on Tuesday.

The application period for the program would start in April, and 36 owners of single-family homes, one from each council district, would be selected. The gray water systems would be installed from July to December. The Environmental Committee forwarded the proposal to the full council for approval.

Plastic bag ban coming

Long Beach almost has a plastic bag ban in the bag, but it will take a little longer than initially hoped.

The council approved the creation of a ban on plastic bags at markets, pharmacies and similar locations in December. The law will be based on a similar one for Los Angeles County, but Long Beach officials told the Environmental Committee on Tuesday that

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the city first must complete an addendum to the county's environmental impact report.

The addendum is expected to be completed over the next week, after which it will go online at www.longbeach.gov, and there will be a 20-day public review period. The ordinance will go to the council by May for approval.

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